

West lived in Wurtland and worked on what is now CSX Railroad. He was drafted in 1950, and in October 1952 he was serving as private first class with Company L, 14th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division in Korea. During a patrol, West's unit was ambushed and took heavy casualties.

Unit commander Captain George Gividen was seriously wounded, and West ordered those not wounded to retreat from the enemy's larger force. West himself, however, didn't retreat, but instead repeatedly faced a hailstorm of enemy fire and grenades to rescue the wounded members of his unit and carry them to safety. And in numerous cases, West faced not only area fire but personal attacks as well while rescuing his comrades. At one point, West was carrying his commander, while returning fire with both his own and his commander's weapon. And though he said he wasn't aware of when it happened, West became one of the walking wounded himself, sustaining wounds that would cost him an eye. But, in typical fashion, when people referred to him as a hero, West simply responded, "They were all my brothers. Any of us would have done it because you don't leave your brothers behind."

For his actions on that day, West received numerous medals, chiefly the Medal of Honor, which was presented by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Again, true to form, West said, "I turned it down at first. I thought everybody deserved a medal." But he did accept the medal on Jan. 29, 1954, though he was still reluctant to speak much of his time at war. And it was obvious that West desired first and foremost to return home and continue with his life. Fortunately for West, he was able to do just that, by marrying and starting a family, and even returned to his job at the railroad.

"He was one great man," said AMV Commander Lori Grizzle, a friend who worked with West at the railroad. "Our post is named after him, and there are memorials to him at the post."

But as much as West the hero, Grizzle says she misses her friend.

"He was just such a nice person," she said. "He was funny and nice to be around. And he was always pleasant to everyone."

Grizzle said West didn't really want to talk about himself, and while she and her husband worked with him on the railroad, he was very humble and didn't talk about his service.

"But his wife persuaded him to talk to schools because she thought that kids needed to know. And he was always great about speaking to the kids about what it takes sometimes to keep our country safe. It was the last thing he wanted to talk about," Grizzle said. "But she convinced him, and he never hesitated then to speak to the kids. He will be dearly missed."

West also was immortalized in a painting that now hangs in the Greenup County Courthouse. A committee comprised of Soc Clay, Tom Crump and Emily Cantrell Stephenson commissioned a painting from Greenup High School art teacher Brian Moser, and then sold prints of the painting signed by West, with the proceeds going toward a scholarship for seniors at Greenup County, Raceland, and Russell. The scholarship will continue, and Clay said that it has quite a large impact on the students.

The official citation of West's Medal of Honor reads:

"Pfc. West distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry above and beyond the call of duty in action against the enemy. He voluntarily accompanied a contingent to locate and destroy a reported enemy outpost. Nearing the objective, the patrol was ambushed and suffered numerous casualties. Observing his wounded leader lying in an exposed posi-

tion, Pfc. West ordered the troops to withdraw, then braved intense fire to reach and assist him.

While attempting evacuation, he was attacked by three hostile soldiers employing grenades and smallarms fire. Quickly shifting his body to shelter the officer, he killed the assailants with his rifle, then carried the helpless man to safety. He was critically wounded and lost an eye in this action, but courageously returned through withering fire and bursting shells to assist the wounded. While evacuating two comrades, he closed with and killed three more of the foe. Pfc. West's indomitable spirit, consummate valor, and intrepid actions inspired all who observed him, reflect the highest credit on himself, and uphold the honored traditions of the military service."

Ernest "Ernie" Edison West is a shining example of how a common man can rise to the occasion and do uncommon things. His life both on active military duty and as a retired veteran is a testament of dedication to the community and country he loved. West passed from this life Sat., May 1, 2021, at the age of 89. But he will live on in the memory of a grateful community and thankful country.

TRIBUTE TO WENDY CURRAN

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the distinguished career of Wendy Curran. Wendy will soon retire as vice president of care delivery and provider affairs at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Wyoming. Her retirement marks the end of a remarkable career dedicated to improving the lives of people in my State.

Wendy Curran has been at the center of Wyoming health policy for over 30 years. She earned the trust of folks across the State with her broad knowledge of the challenges and opportunities for improving care in Wyoming. She forged alliances and friendships on both sides of the aisle, and both Republicans and Democrats respected Wendy's insights and relied on her unique knowledge.

As the daughter of a third-generation rancher, Wendy grew up on the Peryam Ranch in the Upper North Platte River Valley. During this time, spent riding horses and playing in the Encampment River, she learned lessons that would later contribute to her successful career. Daily chores taught her the value of hard work. She developed the ability to "heal up and hair over," a cowboy's term for resiliency. In fact, her grit, humility, and determination represent several of the key tenets in our State ethics code, the Code of the West: be tough, but fair; take pride in your work; do what has to be done.

Throughout her career, Wendy held many distinguished jobs at all levels of government. She began by working for U.S. Senator Cliff Hansen. Other members of Wyoming's congressional delegation also benefited from her work. Wendy served U.S. Congressman Dick Cheney and U.S. Senator Malcom Wallop as well.

In 1991, Wendy joined the Wyoming Medical Society. Wendy was the passionate voice of Wyoming physicians and patients, serving as the assistant

director of public affairs and later leading the organization as executive director. Wendy testified frequently before the Wyoming Legislature, advocating on behalf of Wyoming physicians and patients. She was known to introduce herself as a "representative to the people who save Wyoming residents' lives," a job she took very seriously. She worked on many important provider issues. In particular, she was the leading voice supporting medical liability reform.

Wendy was instrumental in Wyoming joining the organization now known as WWAMI. This acronym stands for the States it represents: Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana and Idaho. These States, working through the University of Washington Medical School, are part of a medical education consortium. This allows students in Wyoming to attend medical school at the University of Washington while participating in clerkships both in Wyoming and across the region. The program gives the students wide exposure to practicing medicine in rural communities. Wendy deserves credit for helping to bring this successful program to Wyoming, and she continues to serve on the University of Wyoming WWAMI curriculum review panel.

In 2005, Wendy left the Medical Society. Recognizing her skills, Governor Dave Freudenthal asked Wendy to serve in his administration. In this role, Wendy championed initiatives to improve childcare, substance abuse services, and an innovative Medicaid pilot program known as Healthy Frontiers. Her talents for creating health policy were so respected that she also helped incoming Governor Matt Mead during his administration's transition. That Freudenthal was a Democrat and Mead a Republican made no difference. Wendy proved yet again that partisan politics mattered far less than honoring her commitment to the people of Wyoming.

Wendy spent the last 10 years of her career working for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Wyoming. In the midst of widespread reform and changes, Wendy remained committed to improving the State's health care system. Her excellent communication skills and well-established knowledge of the industry benefited her immensely. She embraced her role as a liaison between the insurance agency and providers, often bridging gaps and fostering connection. She ends her career as a trusted adviser to all in the health care industry.

In 2001, I was honored to join Wendy in the inaugural class of Leadership Wyoming, a program developed to inspire Wyoming's leaders through exploration and connection. Already an established leader in her own right, Wendy fully committed herself to the 8-month program and later became one of its most fervent supporters.

Wendy also lent her talents and expertise to the boards of numerous non-profit organizations. These included Peak Wellness Center, the Wyoming

Health Resources Network, the Wyoming Small Business Development Center, and CLIMB Wyoming. Her work with CLIMB Wyoming is of special significance. CLIMB is a unique nonprofit empowering single mothers to develop life and career skills. This holistic program helps these women start new careers and ultimately become self-sufficient.

Wendy's accomplishments speak for themselves. She views herself as a humble public servant. Still, her impact on health care in Wyoming cannot be understated and will be recognized for years to come.

Finally, I must conclude my remarks by recognizing the most important people in Wendy's life, her family. Her late husband Denny was a good friend and an outstanding journalist. His passing in 2012 was a tremendous loss. I know he is looking down on Wendy, their three children, Katie, Laura, and Tim, and granddaughter Lillian, with pride today.

Wendy and I have been personal friends for nearly four decades. She represents the best of Wyoming in every sense of the word. One could not have a better friend than Wendy Curran.

The people of Wyoming are fortunate to have Wendy Curran serve our State for so many years. She is a leader, mentor, and advocate to many, especially women working in health care. Bobbi and I are proud to call her our friend. Wendy will be missed in retirement, but I know she will continue to find meaningful ways to serve and to make Wyoming a better place for everyone. Thank you, Wendy, for your committed and dedicated service.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO OLIVIA VAN LEDTJE

• Ms. HASSAN. Mr. President, I am proud to recognize Olivia Van Ledtje of Durham as March's Granite Stater of the Month. Olivia, a 12-year-old book activist, creates videos—called LivBits—that seek to encourage children around the globe to love books as much as she does.

Olivia began creating LivBits when she was 8 years old as a way to overcome bullying that she experienced. The videos gave Olivia a purpose and allowed her to find her voice.

Olivia's first video, which was uploaded to her mother's social media, went viral and has more than 500,000 views. Since then, Olivia has created many more LivBits about some of her favorite books and even hosted a podcast with authors as a way to get children her age excited about reading.

Over the last few years, Olivia has travelled across the country and around the world to promote her love of reading and inspire others. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Olivia hasn't been travelling as much, but because her work is built for the digital age,

she is still able to share her message with children and teachers around the globe.

Olivia's passion for and dedication to promoting literacy and inspiring children in New Hampshire and around the world to love reading represents the best of our State. By promoting self-reliance and self-empowerment through discovery and learning, I know that she will continue to do incredible things, and I look forward to everything she will go on to accomplish.●

TRIBUTE TO STELLA LAVADIE

• Mr. LUJÁN. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize and share the inspirational story of native New Mexican Ms. Stella Lavadie, who celebrated her 100th birthday on April 29, 2021. Her friends, family, and neighbors know Stella as a warm-hearted woman who celebrates her veteran community with great pride and has lived a remarkable and impactful life. A member of the "greatest generation," Stella was born in 1921 in Taos, and while she grew up partially in Wyoming, she returned to New Mexico as a young adult to attend my alma mater, New Mexico Highlands University. In a pivotal moment, Stella recalls seeing Uncle Sam on signs in Albuquerque beckoning her: "I want you!" they said, and she answered the call. Stella enlisted for the Women's Army Corps in 1944 at the Bruns Army Hospital in Santa Fe and trained at Fort Des Moines. Taking great pride in her fatigues and dress uniform, Stella completed duty stations in Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Dakota. Stella completed her service in 1946 when the war was won, but she has said she would gladly have stayed in the Women's Army Corps if given the chance.

Throughout her life, Stella has carried with her meaningful memories from her service, including fellow Women Army Corps member Ruby Hart singing "Till we meet again" and marching in formation every Saturday morning in front of the ranking officers. Upon returning home to New Mexico, Stella continued her Federal service working at the University of California in Los Alamos, then at the Atomic Energy Commission also in Los Alamos, before rounding out her career with a combined 32 years at the Bureau of Land Management doing essential work contributing to the management of New Mexico's Federal lands. She raised three children as a single mother in the 1950s, due to her husband's early death, and built a beautiful family in her own home State of New Mexico.

I want to personally wish Stella a happy 100th birthday and thank her for her service and barrier-breaking accomplishments. In 2015, I had the pleasure of greeting Stella on her visit to D.C. on Honor Flight No. 0615, and I was honored to celebrate her birthday in a drive-by celebration this year.

Stella, thank you for your service, and it is an honor to play a small part in your story.●

TRIBUTE TO BENNIE MONTOKA

• Mr. LUJÁN. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize and share the inspirational story of native New Mexican Mr. Bennie Montoya, who will celebrate his 100th birthday on August 20, 2021. Bennie is a member of the "greatest generation," and his heroism and courage-filled life are an inspiration to us all.

Bennie was raised near Santa Fe in the Village of Agua Fria as the youngest of six siblings. After finishing the ninth grade at Harrington Junior High in Santa Fe, Bennie left school to help his family on their ranch, until he was drafted in August 1942. Bennie trained at Fort Bliss in El Paso, TX, prior to shipping out for Normandy to serve his country at one of the most significant battle sites in U.S. military history. At 23 years old, Private First Class Montoya landed in Normandy 6 days after D-day, and to this day, he recalls the bloodied waters and fallen soldiers from the momentous battle.

During the war, he worked as a switchboard operator and also had the responsibility of driving his commanding officer from post to post. On December 17, 1944, when Private First Class Montoya volunteered to drive a senior military officer to the next post, he was ambushed by German soldiers and taken prisoner. As a prisoner of war, Bennie was forced to dig graves for Nazi soldiers who were killed in action. He was often made to do hard labor in the freezing snow with no shoes and suffered frostbite while under their abuse.

Private First Class Montoya was finally liberated in 1945 and sent to a POW rehabilitation and recovery center in Santa Barbara, CA. Honorably discharged, Bennie made his way back to New Mexico unbeknownst to his family. The story of his homecoming speaks to the power of prayer and the bond between family members. His mother, as told by others with her on that day, kept a prayer card to St. Anthony, the patron saint of lost people and things in her pocket. As she was cooking and praying, she was overcome with emotion. What followed was nothing less than a joyous reunion: Bennie's mother stepped outside to collect herself and continued praying, and when she looked up and gazed across the fields, she saw Bennie walking towards her, duffel bag in tow.

Bennie has lived a full and meaningful life since his time in the Army. Upon his honorable discharge, he was awarded several medals, including a Purple Heart. He raised four children in Agua Fria with his wife, Mary, before losing her to a drunk driver. Professionally, Bennie worked in the local banking industry for 27 years. He still lives in Agua Fria, where he is an upstanding and highly regarded member